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PRESS RELEASE

President Arroyo and US Ambassador Launch Environment and Sustainable Tourism Projects in Palawan

[MAY 10, 2005]

CORON, PALAWAN (May 2005) --- President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, US Ambassador to the Philippines Francis J. Ricciardone, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director Michael Yates, Department of Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, Department of Tourism Secretary Ace Durano, Palawan Governor Joel Reyes, and the municipal government officials of Coron, Busuanga, Culion, and Linapacan joined together today, 5/10/05, in this quiet town of Coron to witness the signing of agreements to help promote responsible fisheries and sustainable coastal tourism in Northern Palawan.

Ambassador Ricciardone said the visit to Coron was his way of helping to support the observance of the "Month of the Ocean" in the Philippines. The Ambassador noted that he would like to do what he can to enhance general awareness of the importance of oceans and coastal waters as an important source of food and livelihoods.

The US Ambassador lauded the local government officials for their initiatives in addressing the critical issues of illegal and destructive fishing, overfishing and habitat degradation. He commended the provincial government of Palawan for its leadership in balancing development goals with environmental protection. The unique and breathtaking natural attributes of Palawan, observed the Ambassador, make the province a most attractive magnet for further tourism development. "However, we now know that, the more profound challenge lies in ensuring the harmonious relationship between development and conservation."

With local government officials and members of the community, President Arroyo and Ambassador Ricciardone were special guests at the inauguration of the Decalve Marine Sanctuary, whose establishment was jointly facilitated by the Department of Tourism, Sustainable Environmental Management Project (DOT-SEMP) and the USAID Fisheries Improved Sustainable Harvest Project (FISH). The party also interacted and observed first hand the use of non-destructive fishing methods such as using of barrier-nets in the collection, handling and packing of ornamental/aquarium fish.



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In addition to witnessing the MOA signing ceremonies among the Calamianes group local governments to implement the FISH Project and among the El Nido municipality and resort owners to implement USAID's Sustainable Coastal Tourism in Asia (SCOTIA) Project, the Ambassador and his party dove and snorkeled in the crystalline waters off Coron Bay, the FISH Project focal area. They have only superlatives to describe their diving and snorkeling experience in the marine park, which features some World War II wreck sites and beautiful Cayangan Lake.

USAID's environmental projects in the Philippines are aimed at strengthening the capability of local and national institutions in environmental management and governance. This helps provide livelihoods and preserve the unique Philippine natural resources.

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